



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Griffo and CNY Veterans Outreach Center kickoff annual Cell Phones For Soldiers Collection Drive

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO November 1, 2024

| ISSUE: **CELL PHONES FOR SOLDIERS; MILITARY; CALLING CARDS**

In recognition of Military Family Appreciation Month and Veterans Day, state Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-C-Rome, was joined by Scott Zoeckler with the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center and Assemblyman Robert Smullen, R-C-Meco and a retired Marine Corps Colonel, today to kick off this year's **Cell Phones For Soldiers** collection drive.

**For every donated phone, mobile device or tablet valued at \$5, Cell Phones For Soldiers is able to provide 2.5 hours of free talk time to deployed troops via calling cards.** All proceeds from the recycled devices will be used to buy long-distance calling cards and other communication services for troops at home and abroad. Some of the phones collected also will go directly into the hands of veterans in need as a part of a new initiative started by the organization this year. The phones will come with unlimited talk and text.

**The collection drive starts Monday, Nov. 4 and runs through Friday, Dec. 6.** The public can drop off gently used and unwanted cell phones and/or tablets at several public locations throughout Sen. Griffo's district.

Drop-off locations include:

- **Jervis Public Library: 613 N. Washington St., Rome**
- **Central New York Veterans Outreach Center: 726 Washington St., Utica**
- **Chanatry's Hometown Market: 485 French Road, Utica**
- **Utica State Office Building: 207 Genesee St., Utica**

- **50 Forward Mohawk Valley (Parkway Center): 220 Memorial Pkwy, Utica**
- **New Hartford Public Library: 2 Library Lane, New Hartford**
- **Bridgewater Municipal Building: 404 NY-8, Bridgewater**
- **Oneida Public Library: 459 Main St., Oneida**
- **Canastota Public Library: 102 W Center St., Canastota**
- **West Winfield Library: 179 South St., West Winfield**
- **Sherburne Public Library: 2 E State St., Sherburne**

This is the ninth year that the drive has taken place. Residents throughout Sen. Griffo's district have donated approximately 7,000 devices and have provided troops with approximately 650,000 minutes of free calls.

"The holidays can be a difficult time for members of our military because they are often so far away from their families," **Sen. Griffo said**. "The simple sound of a loved one's voice can go a long way to lift their spirits. These brave men and women have stepped up to serve our nation, and I am proud to be teaming up again with the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center, Cell Phones for Soldiers and local businesses and organizations to help connect these troops to their families back home."

"I thank Sen. Griffo for again spearheading this collection drive and for his continued support of our armed forces and their families," **said Vincent Scalise, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center executive director**. "This annual collection drive has helped many men and women serving in our military connect with their families and loved ones during the holidays and throughout the year. It is my hope that the community again steps up to help our troops."

Cell Phones For Soldiers was founded in 2004 by teenagers **Robbie and Brittany Bergquist** at the ages of 12 and 13. The charity has since provided more than 300 million minutes of free talk time to servicemen and women stationed around the world through its calling card program, Minutes That Matter. Funds raised from the recycling of cellular phones are used to purchase prepaid international calling cards.

On average, Cell Phones For Soldiers distributes 1,500 calling cards each week to bases around the world, care package programs, deployment ceremonies and VA hospitals. Since 2004, the charity has provided U.S. troops with more than 400 million "Minutes That Matter" and distributed

more than 5 million prepaid international calling cards and have recycled more than 25 million mobile devices, reducing the impact on landfills.

A donation of a mobile device to this community collection drive doesn't just help connect active military and veterans with loved ones, it also helps protect the environment by properly and safely recycling them so not to cause electronic waste, which can be extremely harmful to the environment if it ends up in a landfill. Electronics such as mobile devices do not last a lifetime, yet they are made with products that are non-disposable, such as cadmium, mercury, and lead as well as lithium batteries and rare-earth minerals, and commonly cased in plastic—all things that can cause damage to water supplies and ecosystems.

Cell Phones For Soldiers works with a recycling partner which dismantles the device securely, identifying which components may be resold for reuse - which helps cut the demand for mining in vulnerable locations, and provide funding for the organization to help service members communicate with home and support veterans in need.

For more information on Cell Phones For Soldiers, please visit [www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com).

***\*\*\*To prepare your mobile phone for donation here are some tips on how to erase all personal information that may be stored on it to protect your privacy:***

*Remove your phone's SIM card Erase your address book, photos, messages and other stored information.*

*Restore the device factory settings on your device.*

*For instructions on how to do this, go to the owner's manual or to the manufacturers' web site.*

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